

State impact Pa, (1-19)

EPA Finds Arsenic And Barium In Dimock Households' Water

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By Scott Detrow

The Envi-ron-men-tal Pro-tec-tion Agency has found arsenic, bar-ium and other “haz-ardous sub-stances” in the pri-vate water wells of four homes in Dimock, Susque-hanna County.

The chem-i-cals pose “a chronic health risk” in the Dimock area, accord-ing to an EPA Action Memorandum.

A bit of back-ground: ever since methane migra-tion prob-lems began occur-ring at pri-vate water wells in early 2009, Dimock has become ground zero in the bat-tle over hydraulic frac-tur-ing. Pennsylvania’s Depart-ment of Envi-ron-men-tal Pro-tec-tion blamed the methane con-t-a-m-i-na-tion on faulty gas wells drilled by Cabot Oil and Gas, and ulti-mately forced the com-pany to pay more than \$4 mil-lion to affected fam-i-lies. Cabot main-tains it’s not respon-si-ble for the methane problems.

As part of their legal agree-ment, DEP forced Cabot to pro-vide water to more than a dozen Dimock fam-i-lies. But in Decem-ber, the agency deter-mined the com-pany had met its require-ments, and released it from the obligation.

That set off a firestorm of anti-drilling protests in the north-east-ern Penn-syl-va-nia com-mu-nity. (Mark Ruf-falo even showed up.)

A few weeks later, the EPA began inves-ti-gat-ing the sit-u-a-tion. This memo is the first direct action the fed-eral gov-ern-ment has taken in Dimock.

(Click here to see our app plot-ting every pro-duc-ing nat-ural gas well in Dimock.)

The doc-u-ment states, “his-toric drilling activ-i-ties in the Dimock area may have used mate-ri-als con-tain-ing haz-ardous sub-stances. Spills and other releases have been doc-u-mented by [Pennsylvania’s Depart-ment of Envi-ron-men-tal Pro-tec-tion] from these drilling activ-i-ties.” The memo argues the pres-ence of these haz-ardous sub-stances gives the fed-eral agency author-ity to deliver water to the comes in question.

The doc-u-ment does point out “arsenic and man-ganese [another sub-stance found in the water] are nat-u-rally occur-ring sub-stances,” and notes fur-ther test-ing will occur.

This comes about a month and a half after Cabot Oil and Gas — the com-pany DEP found respon-si-ble for methane con-t-a-m-i-na-tion in the Dimock area — stopped deliv-er-ing water to these homes and other Dimock families.

(Why did DEP allow Cabot to stop pro-vid-ing water to Dimock fam-i-lies? We explained the deci-sion in this post.)

Here’s the full EPA Action Memorandum:

Roy Seneca